



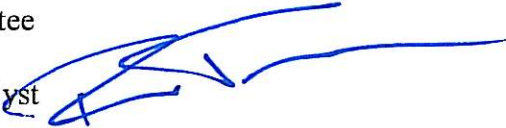
Pierce County

Performance Audits

955 Tacoma Avenue South, Suite 302A
Tacoma, WA 98402
Telephone (253) 798-4927 Fax (253) 798-4906

October 16, 2008

To: Performance Audit Committee

From: Rick Talbert, Research Analyst 

Re: **Pet Licensing**

The 2008 performance audit work program, adopted in late 2007, includes a brief study of pet licensing. The main question that prompted the study is whether Pierce County could license more dogs and cats, and thus increase the revenue available to support animal control operations. The objectives of the study are:

1. Develop Pierce County historical data on the number of dog and cat licenses.
2. Review budget data (licensing revenue and expenditures) in recent years.
3. Develop comparative data from other local jurisdictions.
4. Review the licensing process used in Pierce County and compare with best practices.

Staff met with Mary Schmidke, Lisa Drury, and Tim Anderson of the Pierce County Auditor's Office to discuss the study and collect Pierce County pet licensing data. We also collected data on the number of pet licenses from King County, Snohomish County, Kitsap County, and the City of Tacoma.

Analysis

Prior to 2005, Pierce County and several other local jurisdictions contracted with the Tacoma-Pierce County Humane Society for animal control and licensing services. After the Humane Society decided to stop contracting with local governments to provide these services, Pierce County temporarily placed animal control in the Sheriff's Department. In 2006, the Auditor's Office took on the responsibility for animal control and licensing. The County continues to contract with the Humane Society for shelter services.

Table 1 shows pet licensing revenues, expenditures, and the number of licenses issued in Pierce County since 2006.



Table 1
Pierce County Pet Licensing Data

Year	Revenues	Expenditures	Licenses Issued
2006	\$ 419,802	\$ 242,301	24,117
2007	\$ 485,798	\$ 311,128	26,207
*2008	\$ 512,000	\$ 337,630	26,841

*Estimate as of September

Table 2 shows comparative data from other jurisdictions on the rate of licensing activity in 2006 and 2007. Licensing figures from previous years are not reliable.

Table 2
Comparative Pet Licensing Data

	2006				2007		
	Population	Dog and Cat Licenses	Licenses per 1000		Population	Dog and Cat Licenses	Licenses per 1000
Pierce County	355,089	24,117	68		365,910	26,207	72
Snohomish County	316,365	12,400	39		318,685	19,056	60
Kitsap County	169,090	10,326	61		170,000	9,916	58
City of Tacoma	199,600	24,051	120		201,700	24,583	122
King County and 20 cities	1,144,480	139,442	122		1,160,565	138,734	120

Table 2 indicates that the licensing rate per 1,000 residents in Pierce County is significantly higher than in Snohomish and Kitsap counties and much lower than in Tacoma and King County. (King County serves the unincorporated county and 20 cities for pet licensing purposes.) The explanation for this finding could be simply that urban areas have denser populations and are likely to have greater compliance with pet licensing laws.

Another possible measure of licensing activity is to compare the number of pet licenses with the estimated pet population. The American Veterinarian Medical Association (AVMA), based on census data, uses a figure of 0.632 dogs per household and 0.713 cats per household.¹

Based on this estimate, and assuming 2.5 residents per household, Table 3 uses the AVMA formula to estimate the percentage of licensed pets in Pierce County and other jurisdictions. It is important to remember that this is simply an estimate based on national census data.

Table 3
Estimated Percentage of Licensed Pets, 2007

	Estimated Dogs	Estimated Cats	Total	Actual Licenses	% Licensed
Pierce	92,502	104,358	196,860	26,207	13%
Snohomish	80,564	90,889	171,453	19,056	11%
Kitsap	42,976	48,484	91,460	9,916	11%
Tacoma	50,990	57,525	108,515	24,583	23%
King	293,391	330,993	624,384	138,734	22%

Based on a formula used to estimate total pet population, Table 3 shows that 13% of the cats and dogs in Pierce County are licensed. The percentage is much lower than in Tacoma and King County (which, as mentioned earlier, serves 20 cities), but it is a little higher than in Snohomish and Kitsap counties.

Thus, it could be argued that Pierce County’s estimated number of licensed pets is in line with the experience of comparable jurisdictions.

Best Practices

Pierce County and other jurisdictions have used a number of approaches to increase the number of pet licenses. These include employing people to canvass areas, increasing the number of locales where licenses can be purchased, and marketing through inserts,

¹ The AVMA pet calculator is at http://www.avma.org/reference/marketstats/ownership_calculator.asp
 The Pierce County Auditors Office uses the AVMA formula to aid in its work.

billboards, and other media. These efforts unfortunately have not proved very successful. The Auditor's Office is continuing to explore additional ways to reach pet owners.

Conclusions

Pierce County has been providing pet licensing services for less than three years. Although the estimated percentage of licensed pets is low, it appears that Pierce County does as well or better than some other jurisdictions.

Efforts to increase the number of licensed pets should continue. Quarterly reporting to the Council was required this year. In the future, we suggest that the Auditor's Office should report to the Council on licensing and animal control issues once a year prior to adoption of the budget. If more frequent reporting is desired, written reports without formal presentations could be tried.